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ABSTRACT

A report of the 1981 Wingspread Conference, which sought remedies for the current low state of the humanities in American higher education, is presented. Participants included 60 college presidents, deans, faculty members, government officials, and business and foundation officials. Recommendations are as follows: (1) a collaborative effort should be taken to develop articulation of the humanities curriculum from the elementary to postsecondary level; (2) colleges and universities should review the quality of teaching in humanities in the general education component, and should encourage collaboration across the disciplines and the integration of education in the humanities on their campuses; and (3) colleges and universities should review graduate education in the humanities to determine how it can better prepare young scholars in the humanities for teaching careers in the undergraduate classroom as well as for continued research activities. Conference participants agreed that the ultimate value of the humanities, beyond their intrinsic value as a form of knowledge, is in the development of practical wisdom in private life as well as in the conduct of thoughtful membership in democratic society. The humanities can also strengthen the quality of the public, professional, and intellectual life. Participants considered that the current difficulties of the humanities result, in part, from the vast changes in higher education during the past 20 years. They also discussed the isolation of the humanities, the needs of current humanities faculty, and the need for connections between the humanities and the sciences, social sciences, career disciplines, and other curricula. (SW)

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Widening the Circle
The Humanities in American Education

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A Report of the
Wingspread Conference
on the
Humanities in Higher Education

Wingspread Conference Center
Racine, Wisconsin
March 30—April 1, 1981

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Council for the Advancement of Small Colleges
Council of Graduate Schools in the United States
National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges

Support for the Conference was shared by the Johnson Foundation, which provided the Wingspread Conference Center, Racine, Wisconsin as the meeting site, and by the National Endowment for the Humanities, which provided funds to cover other expenses.

This report was prepared in draft form during the Conference at Wingspread and revised for subsequent review by all conferees by Barbara Ann Hill, Assistant Professor of English at Hood College, who served as Conference Reporter. The final version of the report was prepared by Harriet W. Sheridan, Dean of the College, Brown University.

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Preface

The Wingspread Conference on the Humanities in Higher Education was held at the conference center of the Johnson Foundation to consider problems and issues that colleges and universities are currently facing in teaching the humanities. The Conference, co-sponsored by the Association of American Colleges (AAC) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), with the cooperation of eleven other education associations, invited sixty college presidents, deans, faculty members, government officials and business and foundation executives from across the nation to meet at Wingspread from March 30—April 1, 1981.

The aim of the Conference was to produce an agenda for action by colleges and universities addressing the issues raised by the 1980 report of the Rockefeller Commission on the Humanities, and will also speak to the specific problems colleges and universities are facing in maintaining strong programs in the humanities. Following the keynote address by Douglas Knight, president of the Questar Corporation and formerly president of Duke University and Lawrence University, the participants worked in five small task groups, all addressing the same agenda, to develop recommendations for final consideration and approval by the Conference. In addition to the Rockefeller Report, discussions were based on four action papers prepared specifically for the Conference, which focused on: the undergraduate curriculum in the humanities; the role of higher education in strengthening the humanities in elementary and secondary education; and the relationship to undergraduate education of graduate and professional programs in the humanities.

Support for the Conference was provided by the Johnson Foundation, which provided the Wingspread Conference Center, Racine, Wisconsin, as the meeting site, and by the National Endowment for the Humanities which provided financial assistance.

For poetry makes nothing happen: it survives
In the valley of its saying where executives
Would never want to tamper; it flows south
From ranches of isolation and the busy griefs,
Raw towns that we believe and die in; it survives,
A way of happening, a mouth.

(W.H. Auden, from *In Memory of W.B. Yeats*, 1940)

Introduction

Speaking in 1943 at the University of Chicago, Professor Ronald S. Crane began his account of the "Shifting Definitions and Evaluations of the Humanities from the Renaissance to the Present" with the following observation:

> One has only to browse before the tables in any bookstore...or to turn the pages of almost any popular magazine, to realize that the problem of "what to do with the humanities" (or for them) has become once more one of the critical questions of the day, not only for those whose vested interests are immediately involved but for the general public as well.

A review of the history of the concept demonstrates clearly the varying interpretations with which it has been associated, although at the heart of the humanistic arts from the very beginning has been the expression of things through language.

From its origin in the writings of Cicero and Quintilian, where the concept of "the humanities" first appeared, through Renaissance discussions of "studies of humanities" or "good letters" placed in juxtaposition to the leading educational practices of their day, the concept of humanistic study evolved to include narrative principles. The humanities as verbal expressiveness and speculative knowledge of the nature of things developed into studies presumed to lead to the effective guidance of human actions, with the end not simply "well knowing" but "well doing."

In the work of Bacon and Descartes, the tradition of linguistical literary studies on which the humanities were based in the Renaissance came into conflict with the claims of natural philosophy, a conflict that enlarged in the eighteenth century.

Led by partisans of various physical and social sciences in the nineteenth century, attacks upon humanistic study centered on its lack of utility and its disconnectedness from the main business of life. Against such study were posed practical studies, with the organizing influence of scientific methodology replacing the multiple techniques of the humanities.

Characteristically, defenders of the humanities seem to have been much surer about the ideals served by their fields and the necessity of maintaining or reviving these ideals in modern life than they have been about the specific means by which preservation is to be carried out. That the humanities are in 1981 once again being attacked and defended should scarcely be a subject of surprise. Those who currently demand perceived practical outcomes—answering to Sputnik or ensuring survival in the job market—join with those who regard humanistic study as a luxury of the privileged classes. The Report of the Commission on the Humanities, *The Humanities in American Life*, which was published in 1980 after two years of deliberation, fourteen years after a similar Commission had recommended the establishment of a National Humanities Foundation, ably presents the case for interrelationship amongst the humanities, social sciences, science, and technology, to reduce the public view that the humanities and the sciences form two separate cultures at war with each other, one useless, the other miraculous.

As the Commission report noted, "The Commission of 1964 interpreted the problems of the arts and humanities as a lack of adequate resources." Yet in spite of the presence of funding subsequent to that date, the humanities still feel unrecognized, unappreciated, and unrewarded.

The National Conference on the Humanities in Higher Education met at the Wingspread Conference Center to consider issues of, problems in, and goals for teaching the humanities in colleges and universities. The Conference, co-sponsored by the Association of American Colleges (AAC) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) with the cooperation of eleven other education associations, based its discussion on the report of the Commission on the Humanities, *The Humanities in American Life*. Four background papers prepared specifically for the Conference also identified key issues for consideration by the participants.

Over sixty leaders in secondary and postsecondary education, business, government, national associations, and foundations spent three days, March 30 to April 1, 1981, in intense discussion. Following a keynote address by Douglas Knight, President of the Questar Corporation, the participants worked in five discussion groups, each group covering the same agenda, to develop recommendations for final consideration and approval by a plenary session of the Conference.

The participants sought remedies for the current low state of the humanities in higher education and discussed a wide range of related issues and problems. While the Conference generated dozens of recommendations, the plenary session decided to identify certain fundamental responsibilities of higher education toward the humanities and made three recommendations for fulfilling them.

The participants acknowledged that three recommendations may seem too few to accomplish the task of enhancing the influence of the humanities in American life. However, the Conference considered these three areas so central that it thought little progress could occur until they are addressed. The participants also acknowledged that if they are to succeed, these recommendations will require constant attention over several years, perhaps even a decade. Nonetheless, the understanding and support of the humanities in American life deserve such attention and, indeed, demand such dedicated commitment.

Recommendations

To the faculty and administration of all colleges and universities in the United States, the Wingspread Conference on the Humanities addressed the following recommendations:

1. A concerted and collaborative effort to develop articulation of the humanities curriculum from the elementary to postsecondary level should be undertaken; institutions of higher education should publish their standards for admission as guides for curriculum development on the secondary level. Further, colleges and universities should review current requirements for education majors. Students preparing for teaching careers at the elementary and secondary levels should be expected to devote a substantial portion of their undergraduate studies to courses in the humanities.

2. Colleges and universities should review the quality of teaching in the humanities in the general education component, and should encourage collaboration across the disciplines and the integration of education in the humanities on their own campuses.

3. Colleges and universities should review graduate education in the humanities to determine how it can better prepare young scholars in the humanities for teaching careers in the undergraduate classroom as well as for continued research activities.

The Current State of the Humanities

The participants began their discussions with rueful observations about the current deprecation of the humanities in American life. Though humanists themselves recognize the difference between levels of instruction, between, for example, training in spelling and grammar and the study of the works of the human imagination, or between instruction in Emperors and battles and the study of the interpretation of the causes and results of historical actions—and value each kind of education accordingly—the public now seems to see value only in the basics and to be growingly suspicious of anything that smacks of intangible values or questioned dogma. Thus elementary and secondary school teachers find their curricula in the humanities increasingly restricted and scrutinized. Many departments in the humanities have diminished in the size and standing within their own institutions, as fewer students in colleges and universities major in the humanities or take humanities courses as electives. Graduate programs in the humanities face economic constraints and the loss of their brightest students. Federal support for the humanities, under review at the time of the Conference, has been decreased substantially. The participants at the Conference regretted this withering of public respect and support for the humanities, while recognizing that the condition is not unfamiliar and the causes are not simple. Accordingly, in an effort to lay out the steps to be taken to an improved status for the humanities, the Conference reviewed a broad array of problems and issues.

The Definition of the Humanities

The Conference acknowledged that a clear definition of the humanities would be of aid to the general public's understanding of the value of the humanities. While the participants found it difficult to settle on a single concise formulation, they agreed that a definition should include both subject matters and methodologies. Some preferred a definition by specific disciplines: languages and literatures, histories, philosophy, criticism of the arts, verbal descriptions and analyses of individual human behaviors. Others preferred to focus on particular methods of inquiry and modes of expression: analytical reasoning, critical understanding, historical perspective.

In spite of these different emphases, the Conference agreed that the ultimate value of the humanities, beyond their instrinsic value as a form of knowledge in their own right, is in the development of practical wisdom in private life as well as in the conduct of thoughtful membership in our democratic society. Humanistic studies should lead to the "doing well" of both private and public undertakings. Other kinds of study contribute, of course, to this end, and are more immediately recognized for this value. Less conspicuous, but no less influential, is the strengthening effect of the humanities on the quality of our public, professional, and intellectual life.

The Contexts of Higher Education

The Conference considered that the current difficulties of the humanities result, in part, from the vast changes in higher education during the past twenty years. We now educate more students from widely differing social and educational backgrounds in many more institutions for many more purposes. While this diversity expresses the richness and strength of our culture, such variety makes more difficult the discovery of common educational goals.

The reduction in support of the humanities results, in part, from the growth of the clientele for higher education without a corresponding increase in the involvement of humanists. The career disciplines, for instance, have claimed the largest share of that enlarged clientele and have been little affected by concerns of the humanists. The Conference agreed that humanists from all types of college level institutions, whether two-year or four-year colleges or universities, must work together with colleagues from other fields to address the interests and needs of our diverse student body. Such cooperative efforts should include the development of materials and courses, the sharing of disciplinary expertise, curriculum review, workshops, and consultant services.

The Isolation of the Humanities

The strong encouragement of cooperative efforts among humanists is to some extent the result of recognition by the participants of the isolation that humanists frequently experience, isolation from each other and from other fields of inquiry. The intense focus on individual labor in graduate training, the personal and professional rewards for autonomous research, and the self-contained departmental structure of most of higher education work against collaborative and holistic approaches to education generally, and to the development of the curriculum in particular. Yet the creation of coherent curricula in the humanities which makes humanistic study accessible to all students should be of prime importance to faculty. While the development of scholarly research in the humanities has its own value, so also does the transmission of humanistic knowledge and understanding to the undergraduate. Successful teaching of the humanities calls upon imagination and cooperation from professors in all related disciplines.

The Needs of Current Humanities Faculty

The Conference recognized that many faculty think that even if coherent curricula in the humanities were constructed, the current student body is too ill-prepared to enter into such studies. Rather than blaming the elementary and secondary schools for this failure, the Conference acknowledged that higher education itself bears heavy responsibility for it. Colleges and universities have failed to set standards for students who expect to do college-level work in the humanities. Higher education and accrediting agencies have further failed teachers in the elementary and secondary schools by not insisting that their professional training contain an appropriate amount of work in the humanities.

Recognizing that the skills and expectations of current students differ from those of twenty years ago as a result of the omnipresence of the media and of the recent information explosion, the Conference recommended that humanists consider how disciplines legitimately represent and interact with the world students live in. The Conference thought that colleges and universities should encourage humanities faculty to learn about and to make use of information technology, word processors, computers, film, television, and other media, deriving new teaching strategies from all modern technologies. To accomplish this will require institutional funds.

Of course, the value of the humanities is most directly presented to students through the teaching of the faculty. Because humanistic education is inextricably connected with cogency, ethical commitment, imagination, and sensitivity, teaching skills are of the highest importance. Sterile, pedantic, jargonistic, provincial and lacklustre teaching must take much of the blame for uninterested and unenthusiastic students. Therefore, the Conference urged that administrators of colleges and universities support workshops and institutes designed to improve teaching in the humanities at all levels, and that faculty be encouraged to take part in such opportunities for improvement.

The Conference suspected that what humanities departments specify as goals for courses and what occurs in the courses often may not be the same. Therefore, against the backdrop of diminished support for the humanities, the Conference urged that each of the humanistic disciplines at each college and university should review its own goals for humanities courses and for degree programs and the means used to meet the desired objectives. Humanists must take responsibility for their own status and actively pursue its improvement.

The Conference further recognized that the humanistic scholar and teacher should have a broad education as well as specialized knowledge. Liberally educated professors are to be found in all fields, of course, and therefore the Conference urged that those who bear the appropriate responsibility on every campus should hire and promote those who represent this spirit in any program of study.

The Domain of the Humanities: Connections

The Conference strongly believed that the humanities must not remain isolated in a period of rapid social and cultural change, but must instead accept the challenge of connecting the humanities with other human endeavors. The participants noted that such efforts are already occurring, for example, in the historical analysis, rather than the mere description of the growth of science and technology; in the inclusion of non-traditional materials on women and racial and ethnic groups for study of the past and present; and in the emphasis on ethics in professional training. The Conference strongly applauded such initiatives, but urged that they be undertaken on all campuses and with energetic and collaborative sponsorship of professional disciplinary organizations.

The Conference agreed that the humanities must continue to identify new allies in the sciences, social sciences, and career disciplines, not to mention amongst each other, and join with them to apply the concepts and concerns of the humanities in relevant areas. The Conference argued that administrators of colleges and universities should support opportunities for faculty, professionals (such as those in engineering, law, and the health fields), and policymakers in government and business to discuss the relationship of the humanities to professional fields for their mutual enlightenment. Administrators must encourage humanities faculty to apply their analytic and expressive skills and scholarship to issues of public concern and to participate in programs for the public. Such public participation should be rewarded as handsomely as institutional and scholarly contributions traditionally have been.

Because the central problems of American culture are humanistic concerns, the Conference agreed that the humanities must widen, rather than narrow, their range. If humanists themselves do not recognize the contribution of those who work to extend the domain of study, the Conference concluded, others can scarcely be expected to accept the importance of the humanities for general education.

The Recommendations and Their Implications

After addressing general issues, the Conference narrowed its focus to those courses of action crucial to solving the current plight of the humanities. Constrained by time, the Conference was unable to consider adequately the contributions of the media, museums, and art galleries to the awareness of the humanities in daily life. Absence of recommendations for these institutions does not imply, therefore, that they do not contribute to our common goal. Necessarily, the Conference focused on recommendations for higher education in the assumption that the faculties and administrations of colleges and universities will decide on their own campuses how best to cooperate to strengthen the understanding and support of the humanities.

1. *A concerted and collaborative effort to develop articulation of the humanities curriculum from the elementary to postsecondary level should be undertaken; institutions of higher education should publish their standards for admission as guides for curriculum development on the secondary level. Further, colleges and universities should review current requirements for education majors. Students preparing for teaching careers at the elementary and secondary levels should be expected to devote a substantial portion of their undergraduate studies to courses in the humanities.*

The Conference believes that higher education has failed to accept its proper share of responsibility for maintaining quality instruction in the humanities in our elementary and secondary schools. Specifically, the Conference concluded that colleges and universities have failed to set or maintain rigorous standards of admission that clearly define the level of training in the humanities needed by students to do college-level work. The Conference believes that the relaxing of standards has been a major contributing factor in the decline in student performance and interest in the humanities at both the collegiate and pre-college levels.

Fully aware of the perils of presuming to tell the elementary and secondary schools how to go about their business, and painfully conscious of the motes in their own eyes, nevertheless the Conference wished to encourage in the strongest way collaboration between postsecondary education and its forerunners. Clear direction from admissions offices may be suitable for some institutions, but beyond that administrators in higher education must encourage a collaborative relationship between their humanities faculty and teachers in local elementary and secondary schools.

One such workable model was provided during the sixties by NDEA Institutes. Other kinds of seminars and workshops, in which the responsibility for development and the cost are shared by all participating institutions, might be focused on the nature and content of general education in the schools and in colleges, and on ways to continue on the college level to develop to the richest degrees what students have already been studying. Both typical and advanced placement courses in the secondary schools should be accessible to cooperative review.

In establishing these collaborative relationships, administrators should seek guidance from successful efforts such as the National Humanities Faculty and state councils for the humanities.

The Conference further thought that to coordinate the efforts of the schools and higher education, the groups responsible for higher education in each state (such as the coordinating boards, heads of principal public institutions or post-secondary systems, and representatives of the private sector) should meet with their counterparts from secondary education (such as the state board of education, the chief state school official, superintendents, secondary school principals, and curriculum supervisors) to address the articulation of the curriculum in the humanities. The tasks of such meetings would include: establishing the structure of the "ideal" curriculum for the four years of high school and two years of general education in college; identifying the appropriate roles of high schools and colleges in providing this curriculum; reviewing state minimum course requirements for the high school in the context of the "ideal" curriculum; determining ways in which testing not only would provide an aggregate measure of college readiness but also an inventory of what students have and have not already learned; and determining ways in which high school record-keeping and transcripts could provide more detailed information about the knowledge and skills a student has mastered.

2. *Colleges and universities should review the quality of teaching in the humanities in the general education component, and should encourage collaboration across the disciplines and the integration of education in the humanities on their own campuses.*

"First he wroughte, and afterward he taughte" is the principle the Conference advanced in discussions about how humanists might best help themselves. The quality of undergraduate teaching in those gateway courses that might lead to further study in the humanities, or in courses that play integrative roles with other disciplines, should be of particular concern to administrators who wish to improve the status of the humanities at their institutions. Large introductory class sections, staffed chiefly by graduate teaching assistants, should be reviewed to insure that the quality of instruction is consistent, lucid, and stimulating.

While excellent teaching in the humanities is critical, the Conference recognized that excellent teaching can be undermined if the implicit message of the total curriculum does not appropriately emphasize the value of the humanities. The Conference engaged this problem of curriculum in an impassioned and sensitive debate during the plenary session. All agreed that a coherent humanities curriculum must be part of a student's undergraduate education. However, because of the diversity of American higher education—involving more than three thousand institutions with different traditions, resources, and students—the Conference concluded that it could not endorse any particular humanities curriculum. Arguments were offered about requiring or not requiring a core curriculum, and about using an institutionally determined canon of texts (including historical materials and artifacts) or allowing individual faculty more latitude in course materials. But all joined forces on the importance of demonstrated institutional support for studies that will have long-range significance in students' lives, even though the immediate perception of little practical usefulness may not recommend them.

The Conference agreed, as well, that all colleges and universities must scrutinize their curricula to ensure that the fundamental skills of critical thinking, analytical reading, effective writing, and historical understanding are taught through appropriate focus on the humanities. Furthermore, because much humanistic education occurs in a broad campus context, the Conference urged that faculty at the college and university level work directly with admissions, advising, and career planning and placement personnel so that all offices of an institution present a consistent view of the value of the humanities.

3. *Colleges and universities should review graduate education in the humanities to determine how it can better prepare young scholars in the humanities for teaching careers in the undergraduate classroom as well as for continued research activities.*

The Conference made this recommendation to address the preparation of future humanities faculty. Because graduate schools often do not adequately emphasize the contribution that the humanities make to general education, the Conference urged that graduate schools scrutinize their programs to assess and meet the needs of future faculty responsible for teaching the fundamental skills fostered by the humanities.

Such faculty, it was argued, need to develop teaching techniques appropriate to the undergraduate curriculum, and to be encouraged to develop a liberal arts competence as well as specialized scholarship.

The Conference recommended that an independent national commission on graduate education in the humanities be established. Among the chief concerns of the commission should be: the relation of graduate education to undergraduate teaching in the liberal arts and to non-academic pursuits; the nature of graduate curricula with regard to specialization and integration of humanistic studies and other disciplines; the structure and effects of the comprehensive examination; and the preparation of undergraduate teachers. National organizations concerned about humanities and higher education, such as the American Association for the Advancement of the Humanities, the Association of American Colleges, the Association of American Universities, the Council of Graduate Schools, and others, might endorse the idea of such a commission as a step toward its formation.

Conclusion

Academic humanists cannot and should not take support of the humanities for granted. Scholars in the humanities must be willing to marshall convincing arguments for the value of their work, and they must take these arguments to various audiences, to students, parents, governing boards, legislators, and accrediting agencies. The articulation of the value of the humanities is the responsibility of each faculty member in concert with faculty colleagues from all disciplines, education associations, and legislators. More than money will be required to enhance understanding and respect for the value of the humanities.

The task must begin on individual campuses, as councils made up of faculty from all disciplines unite to support and advise their colleagues in the humanities whose presence contributes to the distinctive liberal arts nature of each campus. It must be taken up by collaborative planning of an educational continuum extending from the elementary school through postsecondary education. It must include institutional recognition of the importance of the development of skillful humanities teachers within graduate programming, and of skill on all levels of humanities teaching. It must embrace institutional recognition of public service contributions made by humanities faculty to local cultural and policy planning needs.

Humanists must come to terms with their own historical development, and rather than complain at being unloved should set about making themselves, once again, lovable.

The Wingspread Conference on the Humanities in Higher Education

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Susan Fratkin, National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges
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Jamie Jaffee, American Association of State Colleges and Universities
Edna Khalil, Council of Graduate Schools in the United States
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Karl Massanari, American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
Rev. William McInnes, S.J., Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities
Jerry W. Miller, American Council on Education
Lloyd M. Richardson, Council for the Advancement of Small Colleges
John Vaughn, Association of American Universities
Roger Yarrington, American Association of Community and Junior Colleges

Keynote Address

Douglas Knight
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Questar Corporation
New Hope, Pennsylvania

Background Papers

Humanities in Undergraduate Education, Daniel Horowitz, Associate Professor of History, Scripps College

The Humanities in Professional and Graduate Studies, Mark H. Curtis, President, Association of American Colleges

Organizational Issues for the Humanities on the Campus, Jonathan Z. Smith, Dean of the College and William Benton Professor of Religion and the Human Sciences, University of Chicago

Secondary-Postsecondary Relationships and the Humanities, Michael O'Keefe, Vice President, Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching

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